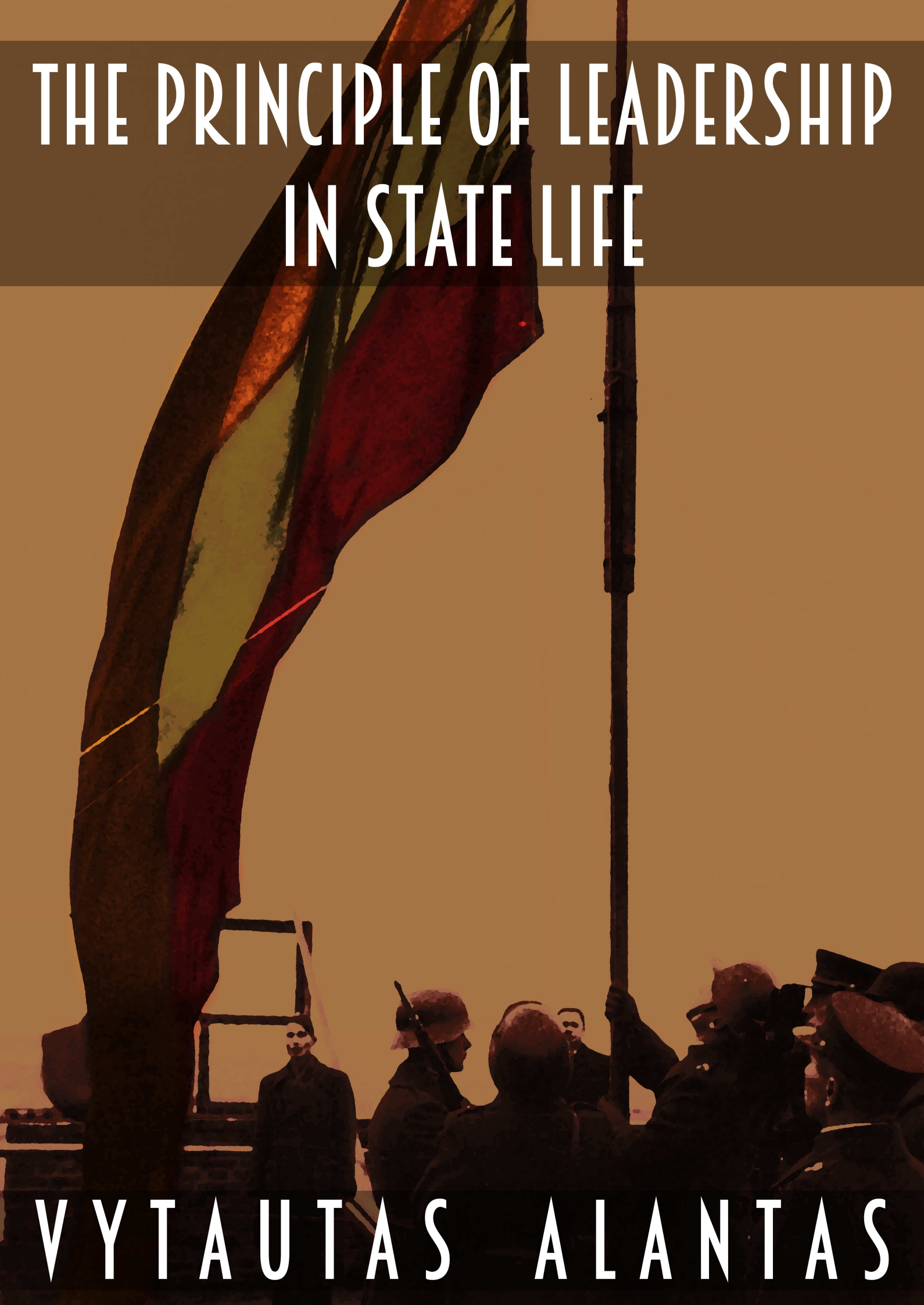
THE PRINCIPLE OF LEADERSHIP IN STATE LIFE



VYTAUTAS ALANTAS

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VYT. ALANTAS

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“To lead is to know how to work.”

— ANTANAS SMETONA

THE PRINCIPLE OF LEADERSHIP IN STATE LIFE

1.

We organize Lithuania's state and public life according to the principle of leadership. It is therefore necessary to examine more thoroughly and, above all, to fully grasp the role of the principle of leadership in all matters that constitute the substance of state and national life.

The problem of the leader principle is, relatively speaking, new to us. We have been basing our state life on this principle for only ten years. And in general, this political doctrine emerged only after the Great War. However, if elsewhere - bearing in mind the greater political preparedness of nations that today operate according to the leader principle - the authoritarian system has taken deeper root than it has here - we still have a great deal of work to do, especially in the realm of ideological propaganda, before the leader principle truly takes hold in all spheres of state, social, and cultural life.

Nothing happens without a reason. If we have this political system today rather than another, it is because there were reasons for it, which we should at least briefly recall here, since the circumstances that led to the emergence of the current system partly explain the system itself.

Lithuania's current political system is a direct consequence of a democratic experiment. The experiment failed, and we had to seek new forms of government. Why did it fail? Because liberal democracy had nothing in common with either our nation's traditions or its spirit. It was an imported concept, concocted who knows where, in foreign lands. It seemed as though they wanted to force Lithuania into a garment sewn by foreign tailors. It goes without saying that nothing good could come of that.

In rebuilding the nation, two primary tasks stood before us in those days: to heal the spiritual and material wounds inflicted on Lithuania by the Great War, and to strengthen (consolidate) the foundations of the young state. All the nation's energy had to be directed toward solving these tasks. The turbulent historical moment demanded that all the nation's working forces be used to build the new state, and that those forces be used sparingly and precisely. It is an unforgivable offense when, in the midst of a busy harvest, a haymaker standing up urges his fellow workers: "You push

the rake to the right, you to the left, and I'll go across both." One can imagine what the consequences of such a collective effort would be.

And such an "effort" was made back in the days of "all kinds of freedoms." Freedoms - or, more accurately, certain freedoms squeezed into the confines of party platforms - the apostles of which ran rampant across the country, spreading a mood of anxiety, distrust, and hatred. Party madness had so poisoned the body of the nation that even today we have not completely shaken it off. Instead of healing the wounds inflicted by the Great War, they were further aggravated; instead of calling upon the combined creative forces of the nation to lay the cornerstone of the state, opposing slogans were hurled - not our own, but borrowed from foreign political platforms and manuals.

Who benefited from this, and why was it necessary? Even today, there are still backward-looking worshippers of "freedom" who, in the middle of the day, are still searching for seven o'clock in the morning. They might answer: the country! If the country's salvation and the nation's happiness lie in anarchy, political chaos, demoralization, stagnation, and the worship of foreign gods[1], then - yes; but if the state and the nation wish to walk the path of progress, if they wish to define their national identity and create a distinctive culture, if the citizen regards the state not as a means to express his own whims, but rather as the goal of collective efforts, which can be achieved only through discipline, the resolve to sacrifice individual interests for the common good, and a passion for the nation's welfare and greatness, then - no!

When it comes to governing the state, the past is the best teacher. From the experiment of liberal democracy, we have learned how not to run the affairs of state. The era of the Seimas[2] was a major political, moral, and cultural blow to the young state, but at the same time, it served as a powerful impetus to seek new paths. It is no paradox to say that in the whirlpools of anarchy, a longing for authority, discipline, and order is born and matures, and new forms of political life crystallize. In those days, Lithuania was faced with two possibilities: either to perish in the waves of communism, losing the freedom that had been won back at such great cost, or to turn the wheel sharply in the other direction - toward authority, discipline, and order - shaking off everything that was foreign to us and incompatible with the spirit of the nation. The nationalist current prevailed, and the helm of the state fell into the hands of those for whom Lithuania is not some kind of testing ground for political theories grown in foreign nurseries, but their own, unique, Lithuanian garden, where political ideas formed in accordance with our historical traditions and the spirit of the nation can flourish and be of benefit to the country.

1 - Foreign political regimes
2 - Lithuania's Parliament

2.

What happened in the development of our national consciousness also happened elsewhere. In many places, forms of authoritarian rule had to replace a failed democracy. If we take a closer look at the post-war political life of many European and non-European states, we will easily see that the same causes produced the same consequences. Lithuania is no exception here. It simply recognized the new necessity sooner than many other states and abandoned outdated political forms.

Instead of the Democrats' slogan, "The State for the Citizen," the slogan "The Citizen for the State" was proclaimed. This is the fundamental difference between the two doctrines. Political authority, which had been completely "undervalued" by liberal democracy and without which no civilized state can survive, was restored. The nation regained its peace of mind, self-confidence, and creative power to strive for a better tomorrow. New guidelines were established for state work: it is not the state that must sacrifice itself for the citizen, but the citizen for the state. The ideal of the state, so passionately proclaimed by the Aušrininkai[3] but forgotten in the anarchy caused by partisan passions, was revived. A new political ideology was created, drawing on Lithuanian reality rather than imported political manuals. In place of the multitude of political currents, each of which understood and sought to manage state affairs in its own way, the principle of national unity was proclaimed as the foundation of the new state.

3.

It goes without saying that, in setting a new course, it was necessary to seek out new working methods. "Quality" had to replace "quantity." Collective - or, more accurately, party - leadership had to be replaced by personal leadership and authority.

It should be noted here that in an authoritarian system, the principle of command is applied not only in the purely political sphere, but extends much further: it also underpins social, organizational, and, at least in part, economic life. Recognizing the necessity of a strict hierarchy, an authoritarian system cannot apply the leader principle in one area and not apply it in another.

That is one thing, but secondly, we still pay too little attention to the fact that the principle of authority is not some kind of mechanical switch within the body of the state: on the contrary, it is first and foremost the state's ethics, binding on all citizens, just as, so to speak, religious ethics are binding on all its adherents. Just as in a

3 - A political and literary intellectual group that formed in the late 19th century with the launch of the magazine "Aušra" (Dawn)

religious community no one considers the observance of certain ethical principles to be coercion, so in an authoritarian system the relationship between leaders and the led cannot be based on mechanical obedience. Both are closely linked by internal, ethical bonds stemming from the requirements of the shared ideal of the common good of the state. The statement that "you must obey me simply because I am the leader" is absurd. I must obey the commander, that is true, but not merely because he is a commander, and certainly not only because he has authority, but also because obedience and discipline are demanded of me by the ethics of the state, which are equally binding on both the commander and me. Not mechanical discipline, but ethical discipline, which forms the foundation of an authoritarian system.

In this way, those who are led are closely bound by a sense of shared responsibility. Advocates of liberalism like to complain that an authoritarian system demeans the individual. The command "I order, you obey!" is supposedly incompatible with individual rights. A chasm arises between leaders and the led, because the former have everything, while the latter have nothing. This is, as I noted above, a purely mechanical view of the application of the leader principle in life. There is no conflict between an authoritarian system and healthy individualism. If an authoritarian system were to deny individualism, it would be cutting off the branch on which it itself depends. When operating according to the leader principle, strong personalities are precisely what is most needed. But it must be added: creative personalities, because today not only authoritarian systems cannot tolerate anarchic individualism, but even the most liberal democracies shy away from it.

4.

Thus, when considering the principle of the leader from a state perspective—that is, as a political doctrine—it must be said that a state system based on this principle is diametrically opposed to a democratic system. In an authoritarian system, power flows from a single source, from the top; in a democracy, it flows from the masses, from the bottom; an authoritarian system is characterized by stability, consistency, a single direction, and a unified will; a democratic system—by constant fluctuation, swinging from one extreme to another, I would say, constant nervousness, and division; an authoritarian system has a clear ideal: the all-encompassing well-being of the state and the nation; a democratic system, on the other hand, usually lacks a clear ideal for the state, as the state is viewed through the prism of the interests of individual social classes, which are defended by political parties, and each party understands that well-being differently; An authoritarian system does not recognize class struggle, whereas a democratic system is based precisely on that struggle: in an

authoritarian system, the leader's will prevails, while in a democratic one, the majority of votes prevails. In short, here the citizen is for the state, and over there the state is for the citizen. These are the fundamental differences between the two systems.

I noted above that in an authoritarian system, the principle of leadership applies not only to the political life of the state, but also to social, organizational, and cultural spheres. However, looking at the issue of leadership more broadly, we must acknowledge that leadership is necessary in every aspect of daily life. It would be incorrect to think that the principle of leadership was invented by an authoritarian system. Leadership has existed since the dawn of humanity. When two people live together for a long time, one of them—who is more resourceful, wiser, and has more initiative—inevitably becomes the other's "leader." Communities that have lived or are living at the most primitive level of culture have had and continue to have their leaders. In a democratic system, where, it seems, every citizen has the right to say, along with Louis XIV, "The state is me," it is nevertheless led by one person or another who is better at pleasing one segment of society or another, or who is superior to others in talent. In some democracies, say, the United States of America, the president has greater powers than an absolute monarch: he is the true head of state.

Let's take a look at the mundane, everyday life. Here, leadership is just as much an unavoidable necessity as it is in the broader life of the state. A farmer manages the farm, a housewife manages the household, a teacher manages the school, a miller runs the mill, a storekeeper runs the store, a dairyman runs the dairy, a bank director manages a bank, a hospital director manages a hospital, a board or its chairman manages an association, a tour guide leads a tour, and so on. This phenomenon recurs at every step of daily life. Every task, no matter how small, requires leadership. It is an inescapable necessity; it is a fact about which there can be no two opinions.

Every society, especially one that has not yet reached the necessary level of culture, must quickly come to realize the importance of leadership. This applies not only on a broad scale - that is, to the entire structure of the state - but also to everyday life. After all, what is cultural progress? It is the creation of a new, more beautiful reality. And the transformation of that reality depends on two factors: the creativity of the citizen and the capabilities of the leadership. However, in addition to its other tasks, the leadership must also stimulate the creative potential of the citizens themselves. The qualities a leader should possess will be discussed later, but it can already be noted here that the success of a given task depends largely on the abilities, initiative, and diligence of the person in charge.

5.

I say this with regard to an individual leader, but, looking at the issue more broadly, it must be said that in public life, the burden of leadership falls upon the entire intelligentsia. For what, after all, is the intelligentsia? The intelligentsia is the brain of the nation and the state, the engine of cultural progress. Its tasks do not end with the honest fulfillment of duties; it is also required to seek new paths. Marching at the forefront of the nation and the state, the intelligentsia is the guardian of the nation's traditions and ideals. What kind of intelligentsia, such a nation and state. If the intelligentsia turns away from its calling to lead the nation, or leads it improperly, then the state itself faces a serious danger of perishing, and the nation drowning in the waves of foreign powers.

Let us just recall our nobility. Having severed itself from its Lithuanian roots and trampled the ideals of the Lithuanian people underfoot, it went to serve foreign gods[4], nearly bringing the entire Lithuanian nation to ruin. Perhaps this is the only example in history where the ruling class forgot its duty, abandoned the language of its ancestors, and erected a Chinese wall between its own class and the people, who for centuries had to endure humiliation and contempt. This is a painful lesson that we must not forget.

Compared to the intellectual elite of other countries, our intellectual elite has an additional special task: namely, to raise our nation's cultural level to that of other nations. It must keep this task constantly before its eyes. Of course, the entire nation must participate in this work, but more is demanded of the intelligentsia, as the leader, than of others. It is the intelligentsia, and no one else, that will have to answer to future generations for how it fulfilled its duty during this period of particular importance to our nation. The initiative lies in the hands of the intelligentsia, and so does the responsibility. It is the intelligentsia's task to foster a creative spirit of work in society; it is their duty to encourage, inspire, and energize; it is their duty to fight relentlessly against apathy, lamentation, and giving up at the slightest obstacle. If you want to catch up, you must run faster than the others. The one who shows more endurance and determination to win is the one who triumphs. Even if today we are no longer threatened by the danger of the intelligentsia becoming detached from the masses, we still face external dangers that compel us to remain vigilant and strengthen our forces. The intelligentsia, as the brain of the nation, must understand that the Lithuanian people, being a small nation, have no right to be a weak nation. Weakness is their ruin. All the more so in these turbulent times, when law and justice must increasingly bow to brute force, when tomorrow is so uncertain.

6.

4 - Foreign powers

“To lead is to know how to work,” says Antanas Smetona. Leadership requires the ability to work effectively, both from an individual leader and from society as a whole. A leader is required to know how to work better than those whom he leads. In this, the leader stands out from his followers. The leader is the brain and will of his followers. He instills a spirit of initiative and action in those he leads. He sets the direction, draws up a plan, and mobilizes the forces to carry out that plan. Everything that remains intangible and vague in the nation’s aspirations, everything that exists only as a possibility, the leader brings to the surface, makes concrete, clarifies, and provides the impetus to act. In other words, the leader channels the scattered aspirations and desires of the masses into a single powerful current and transforms scattered, passive forces into a source of energy.

The leader’s vision reveals future prospects; he knows what he wants and, drawing on the nation’s historical and contemporary realities, creates a new tomorrow. What “will be” for the masses already “is” in the leader’s spiritual vision. The leader is a creative and impetuous surge forward. In that sense, he is a revolutionary.

A leader creates a new national belief and a new mystique of life. And when belief is born, deeds are born as well. To instill belief in a particular cause, idea, or ideal means to bring about a revolution in the mindset of the masses; it means to paint the entire life of the nation and the state in new colors. And to change a person’s mindset is to change the person themselves. The leader’s task is precisely to infuse the spirit of the nation with new catalysts that would generate the desire and awaken the will to create new forms of life, while simultaneously provoking dissatisfaction and even revulsion toward existing shortcomings and vices. The renowned French scholar, Dr. Gustave Le Bon, observes quite correctly: “To create a belief, whether of a religious, political, or social nature; to create a belief in a work, a person, or an idea - such is the most important role of great leaders” *(Psychologie des Foules, Paris, Libraire Alcan).*

To better understand the role of a leader in the state and society, we must pause here to consider one aspect of this issue that, in my opinion, is fundamental: namely, the leader’s relationship with those he leads. That relationship must be as close as possible. It is impossible to lead from a distance. There must be a constant exchange of thoughts, feelings, and moods between the leader and society, not to mention the fact that the leader must know well those he leads. “The army will not obey leaders who command solely by telephone or telegraph. For a leader to be powerful, he must toil and rejoice together with the people he wishes to lead,” emphasizes Antanas Smetona. And he adds a little further on: “Society listens to those who live and work alongside it” (II. 70).

Therefore, there must be sincere mutual cooperation and trust here. The relationship between a leader and those he leads cannot be based on a spirit of the leader's "superiority" and the "inferiority" of those he leads. The only difference between them may be that some, due to their higher education or abilities, have a broader scope of action, but consequently must also bear greater responsibility, while others, working in one leadership or another, have narrower tasks; yet both are united by a single goal, namely: the well-being of the state and the nation.

However, if a leader were to be completely in step with those he leads, his role would lose its meaning. Since a leader blazes new trails, he inevitably faces various forms of resistance and obstacles within the environment in which they work. To create something new, one must overcome the old. This is a law that repeats itself everywhere and at all times.

For a long time, our village had to contend with the deeply ingrained belief that "we will live just as our parents did." I don't think that belief has completely disappeared even today. Even today, many young farmers who want to introduce new farming practices face resistance from their parents - or, if not resistance, then at least indifference, and perhaps even some mockery. We should be glad that such phenomena are fading and that our village is increasingly turning toward a broader path of progress. However, as I said, this path is not taken without a struggle, without certain upheavals, and without a certain friction between the representatives of old and new views.

A similar struggle manifests itself in both the cultural and political spheres. After all, as a new authoritarian system took hold in Lithuania and elsewhere, a struggle had to be waged against the supporters of the outdated democratic system. This means that a leader, even though he is connected to his environment in countless ways, is nevertheless in many cases detached from it in the sense that he sees its negative aspects and fights against them. The Italian writer Curzio Malaparte says that "the geniuses of a nation are proof of what the nation lacks." Heroes, in his view, are the antithesis of the nation; they are exceptions, not the rule. They oppose, rather than agree with, the nation in which they were born (Italy versus Europe). Of course, they oppose it to the extent that prevailing superstitions, beliefs, misguided traditions, and so on hinder a leader from achieving his goal.

7.

Here, we are attempting to examine the issue of leadership from various perspectives: political, cultural, individual, and so on. I was particularly keen to emphasize the idea that, from a moral standpoint, everyone is equal before the state. Concern for the welfare of the state and the nation cannot be measured with a pharmacist's scales. This is the concern of all Lithuanian citizens, and first and foremost, of all Lithuanians. We ourselves must be the architects of our own destiny. One can serve the Fatherland not only by leading one field or another, or ultimately the state itself, but also by plowing the furrow. If the field is well plowed, there will be a good harvest, and the state will prosper as well. Let each of us show determination, discipline, initiative, and enthusiasm in our work, and we will see how greatly Lithuania's prosperity, culture, and honor will rise. We must clearly understand that, ultimately, we are all responsible for Lithuania's future. It is true that those in leadership bear a greater responsibility, but this does not mean that those being led should sit idly by and criticize everything the leadership does. The deeper the sense of responsibility takes root in citizens, the stronger the foundation of the state will be. Authoritarian regimes, in fact, place the greatest emphasis on instilling a sense of responsibility in their citizens.

We cannot overlook the sense of duty. Our national leaders constantly remind us of our duties. Antanas Smetona writes in one of his works: "The foundations of society and the state are based on norms that encompass not only rights but also duties." (I. 226). It is not enough to feel a duty to work well; a truly understood duty demands that we work ever better. Duty is progress. We say that those who laid down their lives for the Fatherland fulfilled their duty well. In carrying out cultural, social, and political work, no one demands such a great sacrifice from us, but self-sacrifice cannot be avoided. Let us remember the leaders of the "Dawn" Era, who were the first to proclaim the word of freedom; let us remember the book smugglers who spread that word. Their path was paved with self-sacrifice and suffering, but also with determination. They fulfilled their duty with honor!

We live and work under new conditions; we enjoy the benefits won by the Aušrininkai, the book smugglers, and those who fell on the battlefield, but let us not think that we can say: today, the Fatherland demands nothing more of us. No, it demands that we also fulfill our duty with honor, especially from the leaders who are the direct executors of the will of those heroes and warriors. Every Lithuanian, simply by virtue of being Lithuanian, is obligated to build the new Lithuania, but a deep understanding of that duty is especially necessary for a leader who stands at the forefront of one task or another. The eyes of those being led are fixed on the leader; they look to him for an example, and above all, they demand that he fulfill his duty. Words inspire, but examples are contagious.

The members of the Aušrininkai and the book smugglers ushered in an era of national rebirth; those who fell on the battlefield turned their ideal of Lithuanian freedom into reality; and our task is to lay the foundations for a new Lithuanian state that no one can ever destroy. Some claim that our generation has no ideals. That is nonsense. We have ideals that are neither lesser nor worse than the ideals of those eras. Only we, standing at the forefront of the new Lithuania, must draw inspiration and strength from the examples of those leaders, so that our ideals may be pursued with the same tenacity as in past eras. Above all, the homeland demands that its leaders fulfill this duty.

8.

Some people try to convince us that the Lithuanian political system is the same as Italian fascism or German National Socialism. That is not true. We have created our own, uniquely Lithuanian form of government, which exists nowhere else. Take, for example, the principle of leadership. In Italy and Germany, popular representation has, one might say, been completely abolished. There, the leader decides and determines everything. Here, "where will is expressed in work, a different person leads, and where a matter is being considered, selected people deliberate," says Antanas Smetona, adding: "This means that leadership must be personal everywhere - from the top down to the bottom - in harmony with the chosen collective." (Speech delivered in 1933 at the LTS General Assembly of Representatives). It was with this idea in mind that the national representation was elected. Selected representatives deliberate and pass laws, but "where the will is manifested in practice" - that is, in their implementation - the Leader of the Nation takes the lead, with the assistance of the government. With the assembly of the new Seimas, our state form, based on the principle of authority, can be considered to have finally crystallized. The National Assembly is, as it were, the roof of the state's halls, the construction of which began after the breakthrough of 1926.

By the end of 1936, it had been ten years since Lithuania had been governed according to the principle of a leader. At the beginning of this essay, we discussed what democracy gave Lithuania - or, more accurately, what it should have given but did not. Answering the question of what a decade of authoritarian rule gave Lithuania should be the subject of a separate essay. To answer briefly, we must emphasize that the 1926 reorganization fundamentally changed the course of our state and the life of our nation. In those years, as they say, a new page in our history was turned. Over the past decade, a major political and moral re-education of the nation has taken place. The period from 1926 to the present day is a period of maturation in national thought. The

heated political passions have subsided; Lithuania has regained its political and spiritual balance, and the country has turned its full attention to cultural and economic activities. It is impossible to list all the achievements here, but a glance at the statistical data is enough to confirm the progress that has been made in all areas. Lithuania's economic, cultural, and spiritual landscape has changed dramatically over the past decade.

A foreigner who had lived in Lithuania for quite some time - and who, among other things, was a keen observer - was asked what he thought of the Lithuanian people. He replied that Lithuanians lacked the spirit of a football team. In other words, they lacked mutual understanding and unity in the pursuit of a common goal. We base our public life on the principle of leadership, but we must admit that we are very often fierce individualists - I would say, hyper-individualists. Creative individualism, as I noted above, is a desirable and positive phenomenon everywhere; however, when that individualism manifests itself in intrigues, fruitless struggles against one another, gossip, empty ambitions, and similar things, then individualism turns into individualism in quotation marks, from which any collective work suffers greatly. This should not be the case, especially among our nationalists and nationalist organizations. It is a major and completely unjustifiable obstacle to progress.

Let us not forget that we, as nationalists, stand at the forefront of the state and the nation, that all eyes are upon us, and that great tasks still lie ahead. Among other tasks, a major undertaking awaits us in the realm of deepening national and civic consciousness. Nationalists must devote the utmost attention to this area. The strength of the state and the unity of the nation depend first and foremost on national consciousness, its strength, and its sensitivity. Cultural work is just as important. Our task, as nationalists, should be to completely modernize Lithuania over the coming decade, placing it alongside other highly cultured nations. This is what our duty demands of us, both as Lithuanians and as nationalists. And that is exactly what we will do!